



California Postsecondary Education Commission

The Nexus Between Postsecondary Education and Workforce Development: A Progress Report

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The Commission's ongoing study of the nexus between postsecondary education and workforce development began with an historical overview that framed the overall issue. In a second paper, we looked at how employers view the contribution of postsecondary education to preparing the workforce. Commission staff is preparing a third paper that examines what postsecondary systems are doing to meet workforce needs. The following is a progress report on the steps being taken to pursue this research and present results to the Commission.

Follow-up from Paper #2—the Workforce Perspective

Following the publication of the second paper in the research series last December, Assembly Member Anthony Portantino, chairman of the Assembly Committee on Higher Education, introduced AB 365, that, if enacted, will implement the Commission's recommendation from that paper. The bill directs that the Commission work in cooperation with the Labor and Workforce Development Agency to create a State task force by March 1, 2008, involving all the public segments of postsecondary education, private institutions, government agencies, and stakeholders in business and labor. The task force would be charged with deliberating and reporting its recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor on four questions:

1. How should the State determine appropriate measures and collect data on future workforce needs?
2. How should the State align these needs with future postsecondary education programs and capacity at both the State and regional levels?
3. What should be the composition, authority, and administrative structure of a permanent panel that would be charged with research, evaluation, and recommendations related to postsecondary education's response to workforce needs?
4. How should this panel be funded on a permanent basis?

The task force report would be submitted by November 1, 2008. The bill states the intent of the Legislature to review and act upon the recommendations "in an urgent manner as soon as feasible after January 1, 2009."

This legislation, just introduced, is an important first step in work to strengthen the nexus between postsecondary education and workforce development. An update on the status of AB 365 will be provided at the Commission meeting. The Commission is sponsoring this legislation.

The Status of Paper #3

In the next paper, staff will provide a more comprehensive picture of what California's postsecondary institutions are doing to prepare California's workforce. As indicated in previous reports, each segment has a different role. California Community Colleges have a responsibility to prepare students for transfer to four-year universities and to offer vocational training and workforce preparation. The California State University and the University of California provide specific forms of professional education links to

specific careers as well as liberal arts and research-based development. The research done by the University of California is also seen as a major contributor to the innovation and creativity that fuels the State's economy and leads to the creation of many jobs, especially in emerging industries. Private colleges, universities, and specialized and vocational postsecondary educational institutions also make contributions to workforce development that vary by their mission, location, history, accreditation, and other factors.

Getting a clear picture of what California institutions do is the first step in ascertaining how institutions view the perceived gap between postsecondary education and workforce development that was identified in the Commission's second paper by the employer and business community. We will seek information from the State's public segments of postsecondary education, from organizations representing private sector postsecondary institutions, and from institutions and individuals regarding the definition of specific roles, the activities and programs that carry out those roles and assessments of how well they are succeeding. The staff is collecting data in several ways:

- Utilizing the Commission's database on postsecondary enrollments, degrees, and other indicators to draw a statistical picture of workforce-related outcomes from California institutions.
- Reviewing relevant reports and planning documents from the State's institutions and other sources at both the State and national levels to better understand how the segments and institutions define their roles and how they plan to carry them out.
- Interviewing key individuals in postsecondary education and workforce development who have knowledge of the issue and who can provide insight into areas where the nexus is clear and where it is not. The interviews are intended to draw a more global picture of the role of postsecondary education in California workforce development, to identify practices that are successful in supporting workforce development, and to explore systemic conditions and issues that may affect the connection.

Workforce Nexus Advisory Committee Meeting

The Commission's Workforce Nexus Advisory Committee met on February 1st and generally agreed with the research questions that are being pursued by staff. The issues that will be explored in this paper include, but are not limited to, the following:

- What is the enrollment and degree production in all segments of California postsecondary education as it relates to selected areas of the workforce?
- What is the educational attainment of California's workforce and what economic effects can be seen from a postsecondary education?
- How do segments and institutions define their workforce development role and what are they currently doing to carry it out?
- What types and amounts of investment do postsecondary institutions put into their workforce role at both the State and regional level?
- Do postsecondary segments and institutions identify other roles they play in the economy that have an impact on workforce needs (research, resource production, etc.)?
- Do projected industry needs for types of degrees align with the output of California colleges and universities?
- Do the degrees that are provided teach the skills needed for California's industries?
- What could improve the role of postsecondary education to workforce development?

- What is the need for local, regional and State-level collaboration between the postsecondary segments and the workforce development communities? What incentives exist for partnerships?
- What models exist for successful connections between postsecondary education and workforce development?

Advisory committee members who represent the segments also agreed to help the Commission identify key documents to review and individuals to interview within their segments who have expertise on the history and practice related to workforce development.

The Linkage to Accountability

In conjunction with the third report in the Nexus series, Commission staff are working on a companion report related to Goal #4 in the Commission's accountability framework. This goal includes three measures:

1. Degrees awarded in selected areas of projected workforce need.
2. Educational attainment of populations.
3. Per capita income by educational attainment.

It is clear that this data will inform the nexus discussion; and, conversely, data gathered for the third workforce paper will likely provide data and information that can inform this report. It is expected that most of the data regarding degree production and workforce need will come from Commission sources, from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the California Employment Development Department Labor Market Information Division. U.S. Census data will be the primary source of data on educational attainment and per capita income by educational attainment, and will be disaggregated as much as possible to consider differential outcomes by race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic, geographic and other factors.

What's Next?

Commission staff have been reviewing reports and setting up interviews for a number of weeks. By the time of the Commission meeting, data gathering for both Paper #3 and the accountability report should be well along. The Commission's advice will be considered in finalizing data collection and in drafting the third paper and an Accountability report. Staff will present the final drafts in June 2007 and will then move on to a final paper incorporating recommendations for further Commission action by December 2007.

